

responsibility to act to improve the world around them; and their actions have made a difference for the Nation's students.

Mr. President, I would like to thank Gerry and Lilo for their contributions and dedication to young people all across this country.

OPEN BURN PITS REGISTRY ACT

Mr. UDALL of New Mexico. Mr. President, President Obama recently announced that our long war and military involvement in Iraq would be coming to a close.

For nearly a decade, our armed forces served honorably in Iraq and got the job done. While I opposed the Iraq war from the beginning, my commitment to our troops and our veterans has been resolute. We must always remain mindful of the sacrifice and the obligations we hold to every veteran.

It is because of those obligations that I rise today to speak about the hidden wounds facing the veterans of the Iraq and Afghan wars. These wounds were not caused by insurgents or terrorists, but by exposure to environmental pollution caused by our own open air burn pits.

Open air burn pits were widely used at forward operating bases, where disposing of trash and other debris was a major challenge, and the solution that was chosen had serious medical and environmental risks. Pits of waste were set on fire and they would turn the sky black. At this and other bases, disposing of trash and other debris was a major challenge, a challenge which was solved using a method fraught with medical and environmental risks.

Over 10 acres of land at Joint Base Balad in Iraq were used for burning toxic debris. This is a base, that at the height of its operations, hosted approximately 25,000 military, civilian and coalition personnel. Among the toxic soup released into the atmosphere from Balad were particulates from plastics and Styrofoam, metal, chemicals from paints and solvents, petroleum and lubricants, jet fuel and unexploded ordinance, medical and other dangerous waste—all in the air and being inhaled into the lungs of service members.

Air samples at Joint Base Balad turned up some nasty stuff: Particulate matter—chemicals that form from the incomplete burning of coal, oil and gas, garbage, or other organic substances; volatile organic compounds such as acetone and benzene. Benzene is known to cause leukemia and dioxins which are associated with Agent Orange.

Our veterans have slowly begun to raise the alarm as they learn why, after returning home, they are short of breath, or experiencing headaches or other symptoms, and in some cases developing cancer. Many other independent organizations have also urged action on this issue, including the American Lung Association which has stated:

Emissions from burning waste contain fine particulate matter, sulfur oxides, carbon monoxide, volatile organic compounds and various irritant gases such as nitrogen oxides that can scar the lungs.

The organizations have called on the VA and Defense Department to begin to monitor our troops and veterans who have been exposed.

Last week I added my voice to that call. The Open Burn Pits Registry Act of 2011 will give the VA the tools to help our veterans who are suffering as a result of their exposure. Establishing an open burn pit registry for those who may have been exposed is just a preliminary step. A public information campaign, to help bring veterans forward, will also be required. Once veterans are identified in the registry, they will be able to receive information about significant developments associated with their exposure. Furthermore, the identification of affected veterans could help improve the VA's ability to treat and understand the causes of these veterans' ailments.

As was noted this week, the Institute of Medicine released a report which concluded that while there was not conclusive evidence of a link between burn pits and medical ailments, that there was insufficient evidence to rule out a link as well. An online summary of the report stated a recommendation that:

a study be conducted that would evaluate the health status of service members from their time of deployment to Joint Base Balad over many years to determine their incidence of chronic diseases, including cancers, that tend to not show up for decades.

This registry will help our medical and scientific experts better analyze who was exposed and who is suffering. In New Mexico, veterans have begun to come forward about their medical conditions. Some, like MSG Jessey Baca, a member of the New Mexico Air National Guard who was stationed in Balad, Iraq, are facing serious ailments such as cancer and chronic bronchiolitis. It is stories like Master Sergeant Baca's which have motivated me to take action on this issue and I urge my colleagues to hear the stories of veterans like him in all 50 States.

The Open Burn Pits Registry Act has bipartisan and bicameral support. In the House, Representative AKIN, a Republican, is sponsoring this important piece of legislation with a strong bipartisan group. On the Senate side I would like to thank my colleagues who are also addressing this important issue facing our veterans. Senator CORKER and I, who is the Republican lead, have been joined by Senators MCCASKILL, BINGAMAN, SCHUMER, ALEXANDER, and BILL NELSON, who have all signed on to lead this charge as original cosponsors. In addition, Senator WYDEN has also indicated that he will join as a cosponsor. I thank them for being champions for our veterans suffering from these hidden wounds, and I would urge my colleagues to support this bill.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

MUSIC IN JOPLIN, MISSOURI

• Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, today I want to spotlight a generous act that will help a school and a community recover from a terrible natural disaster.

Joplin, MO, was devastated this past May by the worst tornado to strike the United States in 60 years. This horrific storm cut a 6-mile swath through Joplin, killing 162 people and destroying more than 8,000 buildings, including thousands of homes and many of the city's schools.

The people of Joplin have worked heroically to rebuild their community. At the end of August, students returned to school. Thanks to donations from people across America and around the world, every student received a backpack with school supplies and a new laptop computer.

Barry Manilow saw one need that had not been met: Among the countless losses in the tornado were all the musical instruments used by students in the band at Joplin High School and other city schools.

Last month, Barry arrived in Joplin with three truckloads of instruments, worth about \$300,000. He presented the donation personally on the football field at Joplin High. Barry noted that his own high school music program in Brooklyn, NY, had nurtured his talent and opened the way for his amazing musical career.

Barry Manilow's gift to Joplin was tremendous but not unique for him. Through his nonprofit Manilow Music Project, Barry has helped public schools across the country to survive despite drastic cuts to school funding for the arts. He not only writes the songs; he also writes checks that enable school music programs to keep bringing the gift of music to our students, schools, and communities.

I salute Barry Manilow today and am deeply moved by his act of kindness. It brings me great pride to call him not only a Californian, but also a friend. •

REMEMBERING PAT TAKASUGI

• Mr. CRAPO. Mr. President, today I wish to honor the life of Idaho State Representative Pat Takasugi. I join his family and friends in mourning the passing of this great Idahoan.

Pat's efforts and input on behalf of Idaho agriculture were indispensable. He had the experience and association through his role as the director of the Idaho State Department of Agriculture and a number of agricultural organizations and the on-the-ground knowledge of an innovative farmer that were instrumental in improving agricultural policy. His advocacy for Idaho agriculture advanced its position in domestic and foreign markets, and he leaves behind a legacy of skilled support.

We are all better for having known Pat Takasugi. His intelligence, humility and dedication were exemplary. He